

Contextualizing English Instruction to Focus on Environmental Issues

For a learning context to be authentic, it should be both personally and socially relevant. One such authentic focus for learners today is environmental preservation due to the changing state of the environment and the impact of this change on our shared future.

In this webinar, we will:

- examine teaching techniques—including chants, replacement performance role plays, and activities that involve discussing possible solutions to local issues—to contextualize language learning within local, environmental settings
- explore how to use authentic materials to connect local to global ecological concerns for learners of all ages and proficiency levels



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Contextualizing English Instruction to Focus on Environmental Issues



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Session Goals

To examine key terms and concepts related to contextualized language instruction focused on environmental issues

To demonstrate these concepts in action by exploring two adaptable ELT techniques and one innovative resource. These are:

- Jazz chants
- Replacement performance role-plays
- Environmental footprint calculators



Contextualized Language Learning: Environmental Issues

Key terms & concepts



Contextualization

Language learning reflects a situation that is **relevant** to students.



(Shaping the Way We Teach English, Module 1)

Authenticity

- Language use has a real **purpose** in a real **context**.
- Texts that are used for learning English are not just for learning English.



What are the benefits of using authentic materials and contexts in the English language classroom?



Why Use Authentic Materials and Contexts in English Class?

1. **Communicate meaning and information** – produced for **real communication** rather than to teach language. (Thomas, 2014)
2. Bring a **fresh perspective** and **new ideas** into the classroom.
3. Help **foster connections** to other subject-areas (great for **CBI, CLIL, PBL** teachers).
4. Often **free** and very **easy to find online** or in certain locations in your communities.



“By integrating environmental education into the language classroom, educators can

- (1) heighten students’ interest in contemporary issues that might directly influence their futures;
- (2) teach students how to contribute to a healthier, more sustainable world; and
- (3) promote language learning and meaningful communication.”

(Hauschild, Poltavtchenko, & Stoller, 2012)

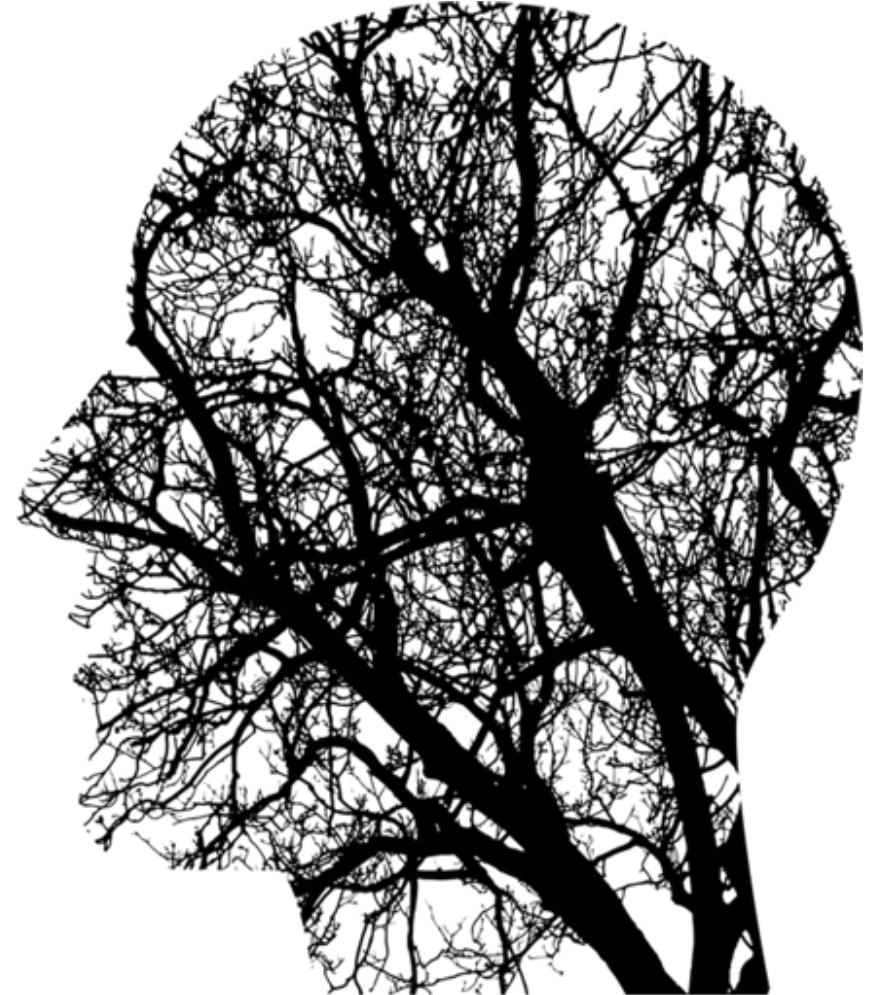


What do you think of ...?

sustainability

environment

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Knowing Our Terms

Sustainability -
Living within **planetary boundaries**

(Raworth, 2017)

Environmental Education -
Learning to **improve our behavior** in the
environment

(US EPA, 2021)



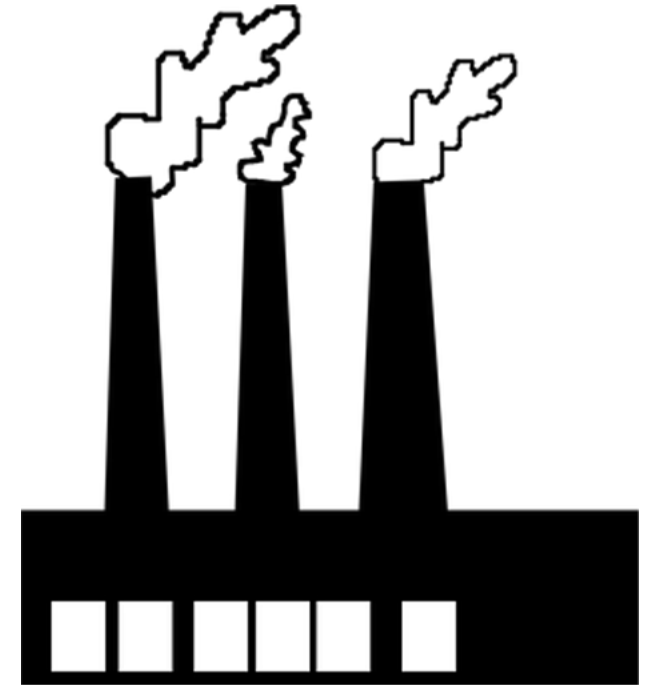


What is an important sustainability issue for you?

**Which sustainability
topics might be
interesting to address in
your classes?**



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Classroom Techniques

1. Jazz Chants



Jazz Chants - Purpose:

Practice natural rhythm of spoken English

Carolyn Graham noticed that English's **rhythm** is reflected in the rhythm of American jazz.



Jazz Chants: Advantages

Practical for the teacher

- adaptable to different ages and English proficiency levels
- simple to prepare
- easy to contextualize
- reflect vocabulary, phrases, and grammar points the class is working on
- can be used at different lesson stages, warm-up, vocabulary focus, review, transition
- work well in any class size



Jazz Chants: Advantages

Engaging for the students

- comfort practicing pronunciation in groups
- can be prepared by students
- can be chanted in storytelling

Fun way to develop metalinguistic awareness

(thinking about language structure)



Chants use familiar vocabulary.



beach



city



earth

Step 1: Prepare the chant.

Choose the topic, vocabulary, and phrases.

Use familiar vocabulary OR only a few new words.



We're in it together!
Together, make a cleaner world!

Linking sounds between words–

We're in it together!

sounds like:

Weer-rin-nih-together!



Step 2: Present the vocabulary and phrases to the students.

Use the words OR pictures or both.



We're in it together!
Together, make a cleaner world!

Step 3: Tap the beat.

1 2 3 4

Step 4: Tap the beat and perform the chant.

We're In It Together!

Keep the beach clean! (clap)

We're in it together!

Keep the city clean! (clap)

We're in it together!

Keep the earth clean! (clap)

We're in it together!

Together make a cleaner world!

Let's try a **change**!

Keep the _____ **green**! (clap)

We're **in** it **together**.

Keep the _____ **green**! (clap)

We're **in** it **together**.

Keep the _____ **green**! (clap)

We're **in** it **together**.

Together, make a **greener** world!

What places would you like to keep **green**?



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Keep It Green!

Keep the _____ green! (clap)

We're in it together.

Keep the _____ green! (clap)

We're in it together.

Keep the _____ green! (clap)

We're in it together.

Together, make a greener world!

Vocabulary Chants

- Pronounce related vocabulary words
- Emphasis on syllable stress
- Each word has one syllable with strong stress.

** A link to a short video of Carolyn Graham explaining how to create vocabulary chants will be available on the AE Live Webinar Resource Center. **



Vocabulary Chants

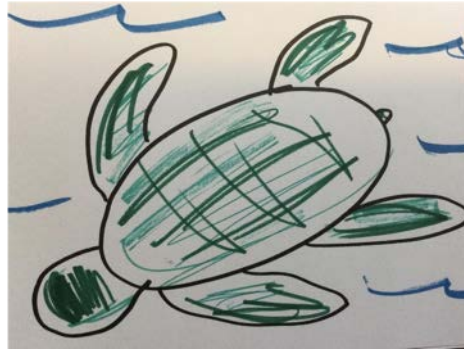
Step 1: Choose a topic.

Animals of the
Galapagos Islands of Ecuador

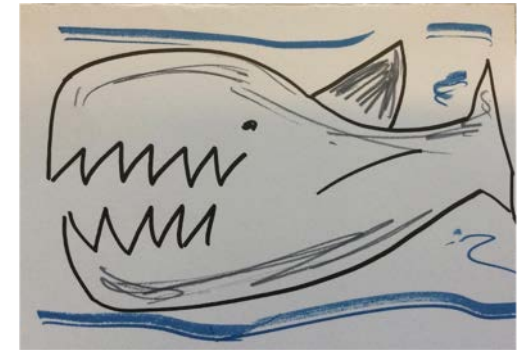
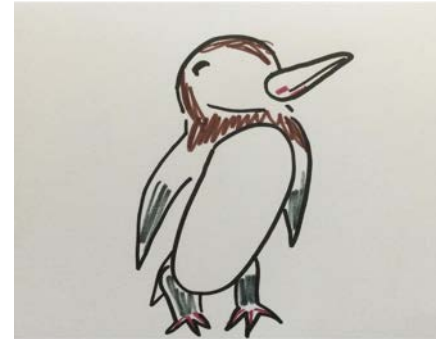


Step 2: List three vocabulary words from the topic on the board.

turtle



penguin



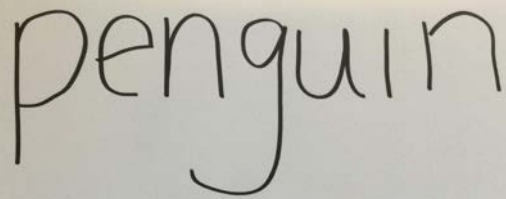
shark

You can draw pictures, too!

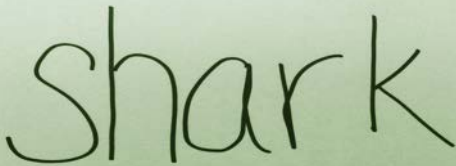
Step 3: Create the chant.



turtle



penguin



shark

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)

Turtle, penguin

Turtle, penguin

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)

Step 4: Perform the chant

1. Tap the clap.
2. Tap the beat with the chant.

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)

Turtle, penguin

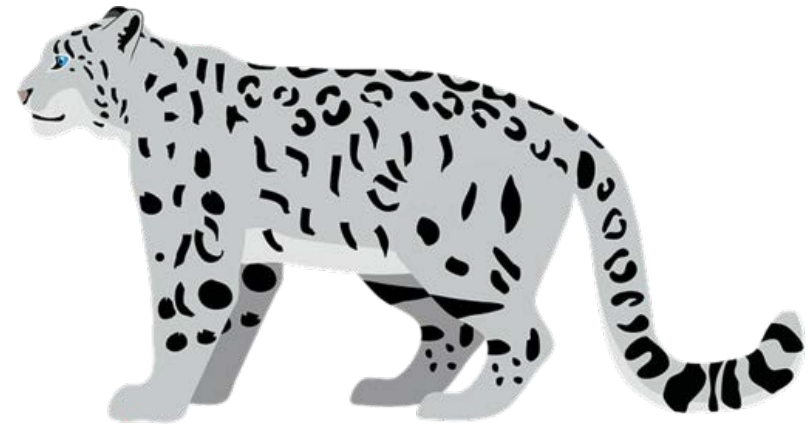
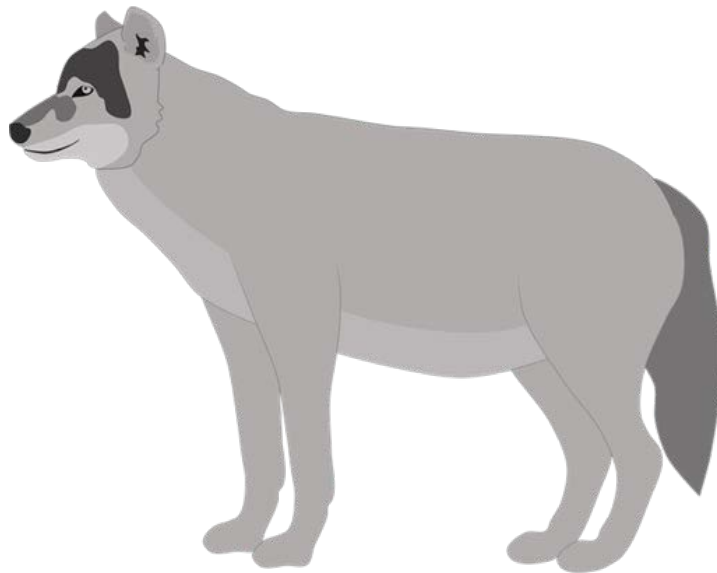
Turtle, penguin

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)

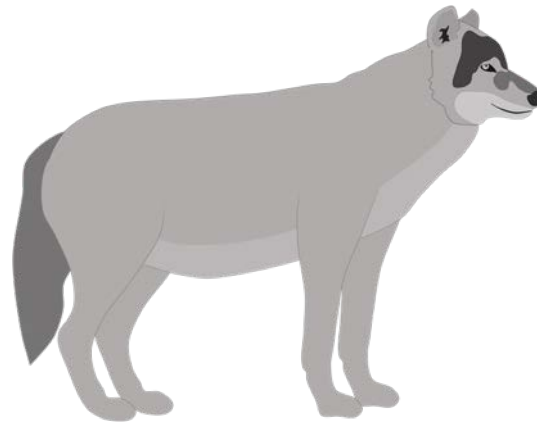
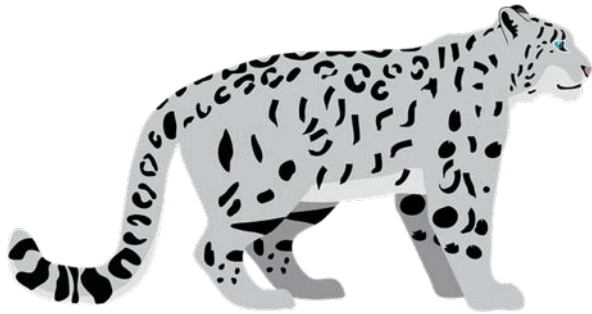
Let's try it!

Respecting animals is an important environmental topic.

List three animals we should protect.



Let's try it!



Leopard, wolf, rhino! (clap)

Leopard, wolf, rhino! (clap)

Leopard, wolf!

Leopard, wolf!

Leopard, wolf, rhino! (clap)

Let's make our own!

What animals should we protect?

- Suggest an animal!
- You can suggest more than one!



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



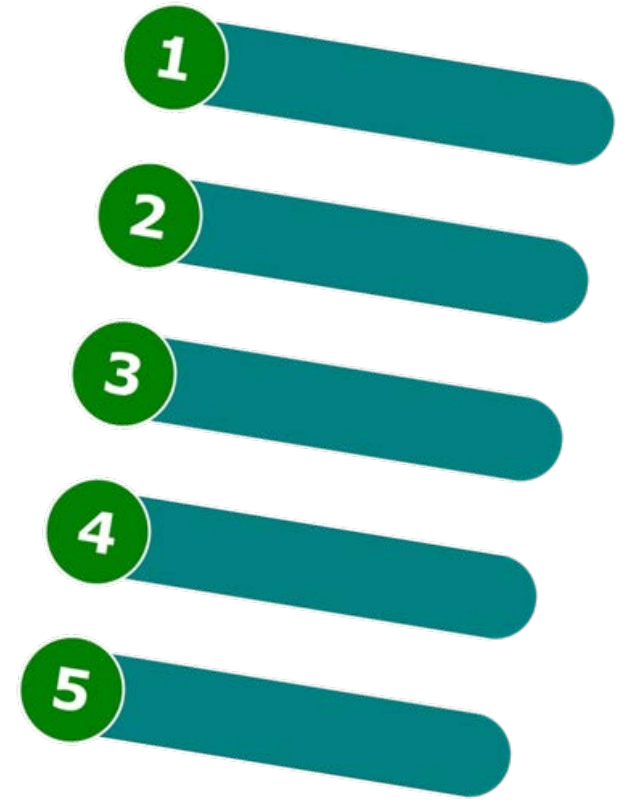
Extension: Syllable Challenge!

1. Ask students to list vocabulary words.
2. Organize words by syllables with the students in columns.
3. Use words from the chart to make a chant to follow a syllable pattern: for example, 2 - 1 - 2

1	2	3
wolf	leopard	pelican
shark	rhino	octopus
squid	monkey	elephant

Involve the students!

1. Brainstorm a vocabulary list with students related to the environmental topic.
2. Write the vocabulary words on cards or the board.
3. Practice pronunciation of words.
4. Organize the words by number of syllables.
5. Create a chant.



**How could you change your
voice or use actions to
practice vocabulary chants
with your students?**



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Ideas for Practice

Vocabulary Chants

1. Practice the **rhythm** by clapping or tapping.
2. Practice the **chant** by clapping or tapping.
3. **Play with voice**
 - a. change pitch (high-low)
 - b. volume (loud-quiet)
 - c. speed (fast-slow)
4. **Play with chant**
 - a. assign groups lines
 - b. incorporate gestures & actions
 - c. include in storytelling
 - d. use picture cues
 - e. ask students to create chants



Standing Up for Nature

We can use English to speak up in difficult situations.

It is rare to see in textbooks,
BUT

it is important for environmental protection!



Classroom Techniques

2. Replacement Performance Role-Play



When you use role-plays with your students, what topics or situations do you use?



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Replacement Performance Role-Play

Maria Snarski

Purpose: To engage students in
authentic, problem-solving

Proficiency: High-beginner to
advanced

Skills: Writing and speaking



(Snarski, 2007)

Replacement Performance Role-Play



Respond

Rehearse

Replace

Reflect

Steps

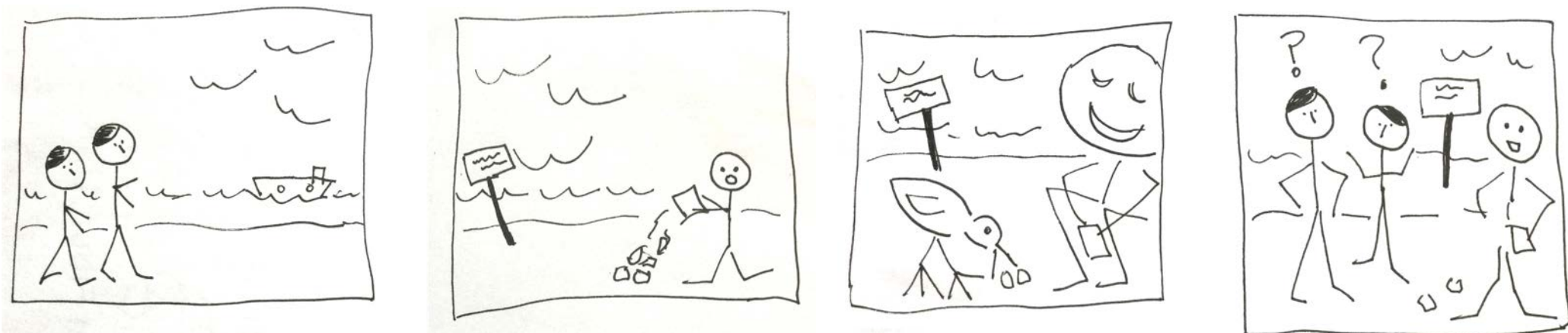
1. The teacher proposes an **unresolved problem** for **specific roles**.



Scenario: Problem at the Beach

Roles:

- Local residents 1 and 2; they are friends.
- Tourist visiting a beach





How would you respond to the **tourist's actions?**

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Steps

2. Put students in groups (ideally, reflecting the number of roles), students collaborate in groups to write skits that resolve the problem.

[RESPOND]

3. Groups **rehearse** their own skit.

[REHEARSE]

4. A volunteer group (Group 1) **performs** their skit.



Steps

5. The class **discusses the resolution** of the problem in the skit. **[RESPOND]** Perhaps another group (Group 2) has solved the problem differently and wants to share.
6. A member from Group 2 performs the changed role in the Group 1 skit. This **changes the dynamic** and the outcome. **[REPLACE]**



Steps

7. The class **reflects** on the changing situation.
[REFLECT]
8. Other students in the class can coach the actors on **what to do next**.

** Find detailed steps for this activity in Maria Snarski's *English Teaching Forum* article, on the AE Live Webinar Resource Center. **



What do you think?

What are some advantages of using replacement performance role-plays to practice speaking?



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Advantages of Replacement Performance Role-Play

1. **Practical** for the teacher
 - a. simple to prepare
 - b. easy to contextualize
 - c. flexible: can use picture cues or prepared scenario related to real life situations
2. **Engaging** for the students
 - a. develop student agency
 - b. situations reflect many different experiences
 - c. responses vary, keeping the activity fresh



Variation Ideas

- Students can suggest situations from personal experience, news, or fiction.
- Roles can be professional. For example, students could take on the role of rangers, naturalist guides, or environmental scientists.
- Teachers can suggest politeness phrases for students to practice.
- Students can record their skits and post videos to share online. Teachers can lead an online reflection.



Classroom Resource

3. Environmental Footprint Calculators



Environmental Footprint

What do you think of when
you hear the phrase,
environmental footprint?



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



Environmental Footprint

*the effect that people have on the **environment** through their lifestyle and actions*





**Have you ever used an
environmental footprint
calculator?**

Environmental Footprint Calculators

Tools that show users how their lifestyle affects our planet.

A **bigger** environmental footprint means you are having a **more negative** impact on the planet.



**Based on
environmental
research data**

Online or Offline

How To: Environmental Footprint Calculators

How to find:

1. Find online calculators via a website
2. Download and print premade paper-based calculators from online sources
3. Teachers can create their own calculator to use with their students.



How to use:

1. Individually
2. In groups
3. With the whole class
4. Online, on paper or blackboard
5. At home, school, or on a field trip

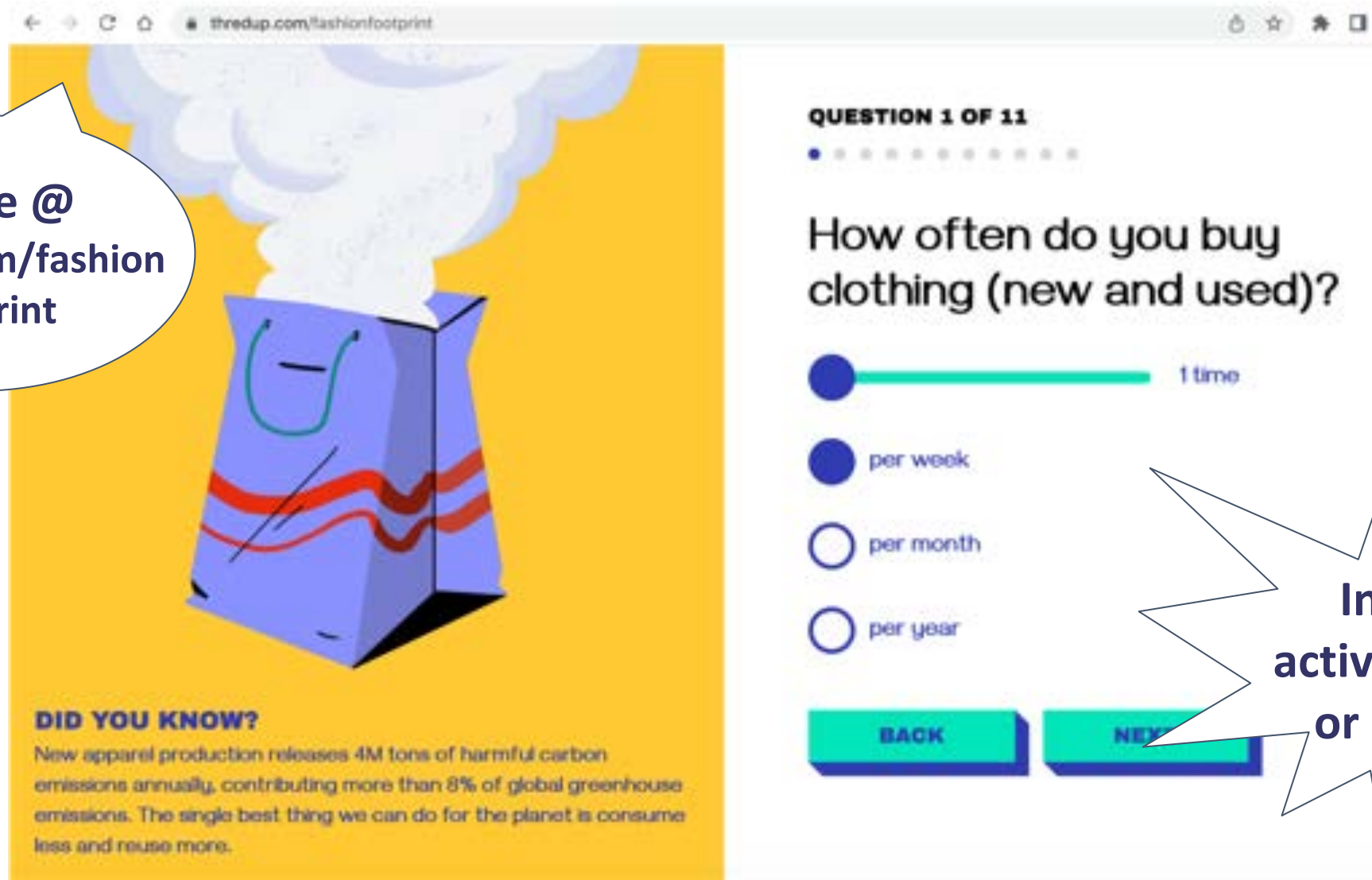
Calculating Environmental Footprints

1. Fashion Footprint Calculator
2. “Unpacking your Lunch” Quiz
3. Classroom Trash Tracker



1. Fashion Footprint Calculator

Online @
[thredup.com/fashion
footprint](https://thredup.com/fashionfootprint)

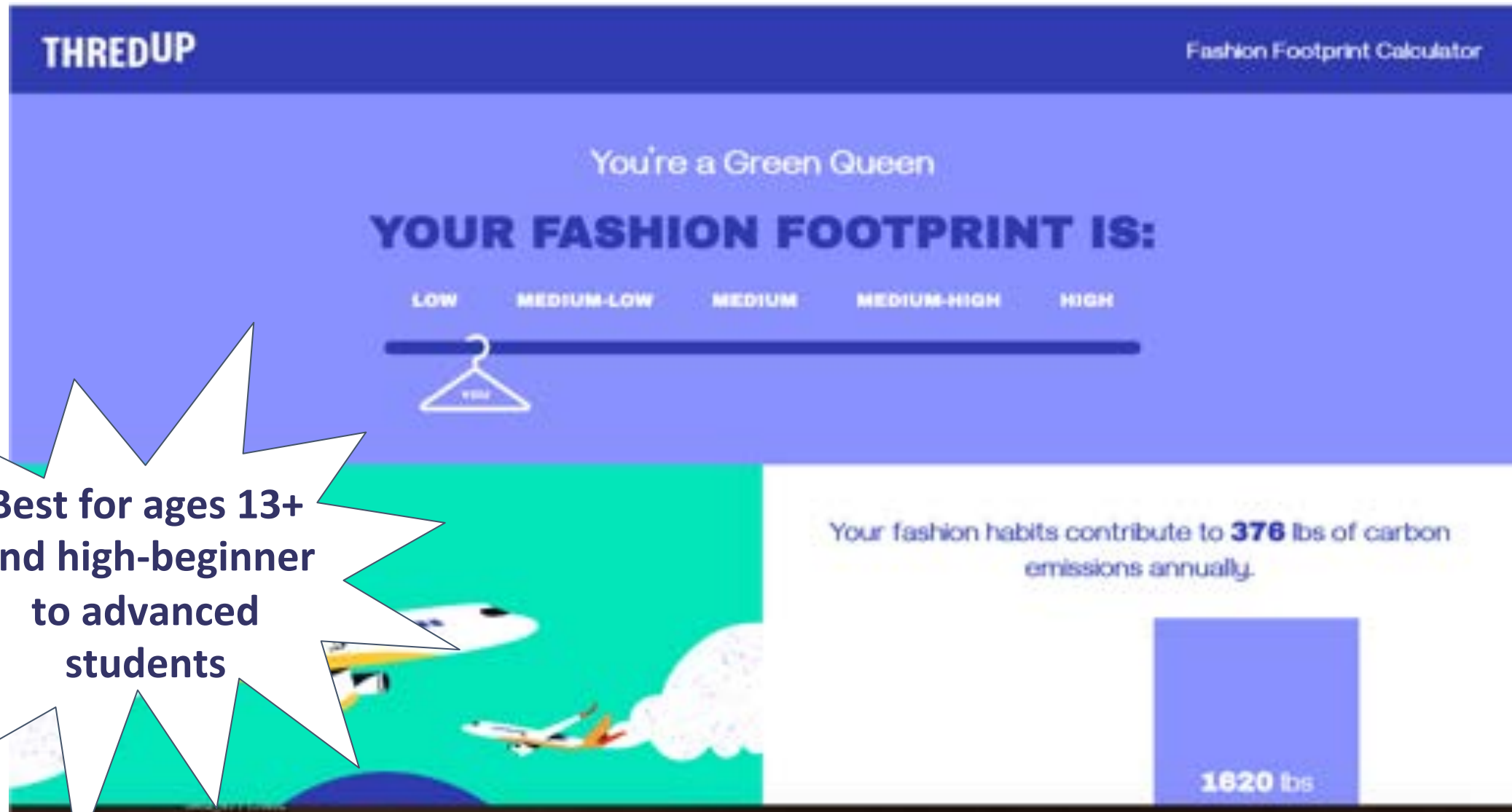


The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL thredup.com/fashionfootprint. On the left, there is a graphic of a blue shopping bag with red and white stripes, emitting a large cloud of white smoke against a yellow background. Below the graphic, a text box titled "DID YOU KNOW?" states: "New apparel production releases 4M tons of harmful carbon emissions annually, contributing more than 8% of global greenhouse emissions. The single best thing we can do for the planet is consume less and reuse more."

On the right, the calculator interface displays "QUESTION 1 OF 11" with a progress indicator of 1 out of 11 dots. The question is "How often do you buy clothing (new and used)?". There are four radio button options: "1 time" (selected), "per week", "per month", and "per year". At the bottom of the question area are two buttons: "BACK" and "NEXT".

Individual
activity at home
or in school!

1. Fashion Footprint Calculator



Best for ages 13+
and high-beginner
to advanced
students

1. Fashion Footprint Calculator Tips

Teachers can **model** the activity or provide **guidance** and **scaffolding**

1. **Model** how to fill out the calculator
2. **Pre-teach** or review new vocabulary for increased comprehension.
3. **Follow up** with a discussion or extension activity

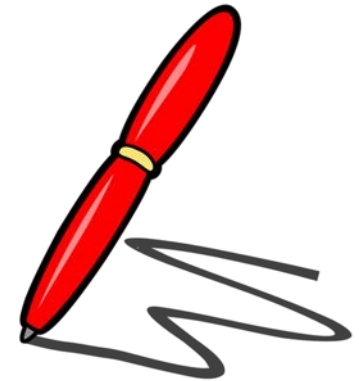
Vocabulary List		
Word	Definition	Sentence
Secondhand	Something used by someone else before	<u>Secondhand</u> jeans are cheaper than new jeans.

1. Fashion Footprint Calculator Extension

Write a reflective journal entry about your fashion footprint.

1. How do you feel about your fashion footprint?
2. What did you learn from your results?
3. What changes can you make to reduce your footprint?

My fashion footprint makes me feel _____.



2. Unpacking Your Lunch

An activity for students to calculate the sustainability of their lunch using a short quiz.

**Individual
activity!**



**Offline
Activity!**

**High-beginner
to advanced**

Let's Give it A Try!

1. Think about your last meal (breakfast, lunch, or dinner).

How many pieces of trash did your meal produce?

- a. None!
- b. Only one
- c. Two or more pieces



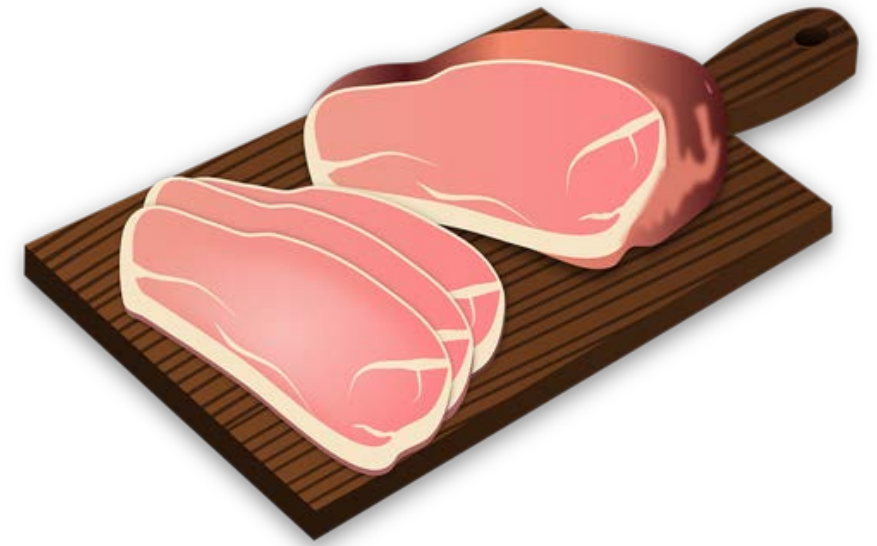
2. Where did the food in your meal come from?

- a. I didn't buy anything – I grew all the food in my backyard garden or farm!
- b. I bought it from a local shop or market that is walking distance from my home.
- c. It came from far away—I had to go by car to purchase my food at a large supermarket.



3. How much meat was in your meal?

- a. None at all!
- b. There was some meat like chicken or turkey, but no beef.
- c. It included beef.



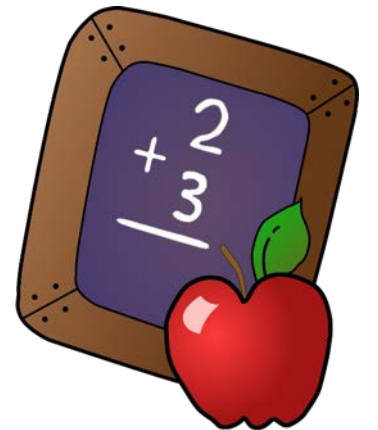
Calculate your score...

a. = 1 point

b. = 2 points

c. = 3 points

The higher your score, the bigger your environmental footprint (based on your last meal!)



Discuss and Reflect

**How did the quiz make
you feel?
Were you surprised by
your score?**



2. Unpacking Your Lunch

Always support your students ...

Be sure to **follow up** with a discussion and/or extension activity and help them **brainstorm solutions**.





What is an extension or follow-up activity you could do with students after they “unpack” their lunch?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.

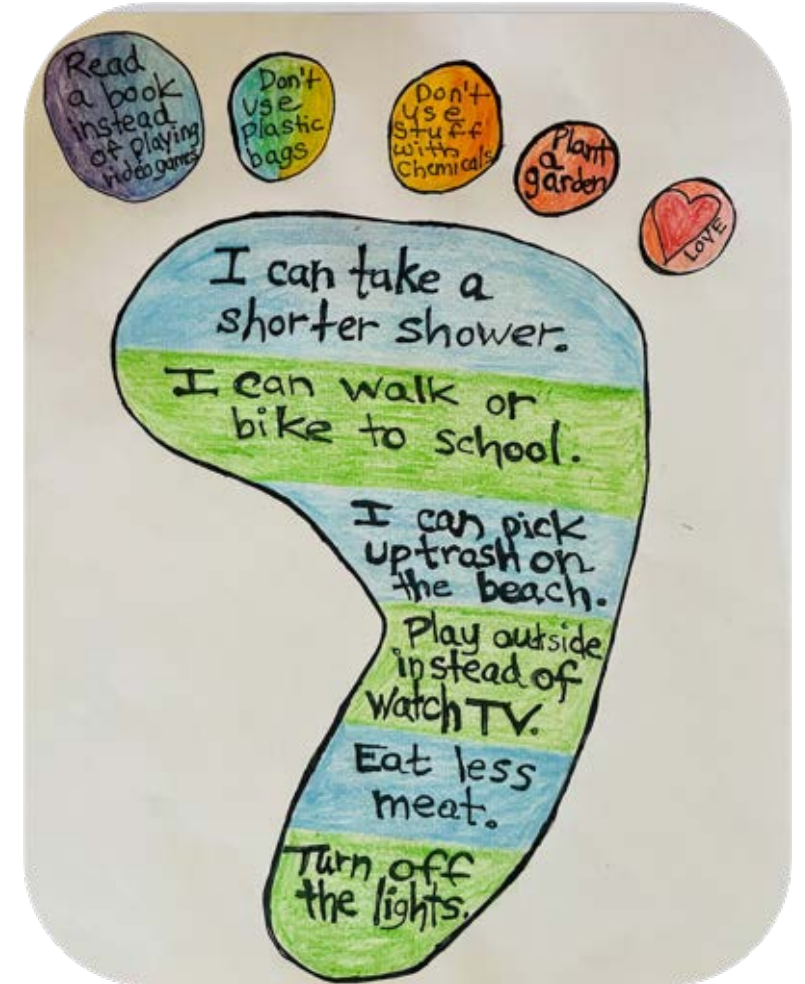


Extension: How Can I Reduce My Footprint?

An activity that encourages self-reflection & promotes a positive outlook

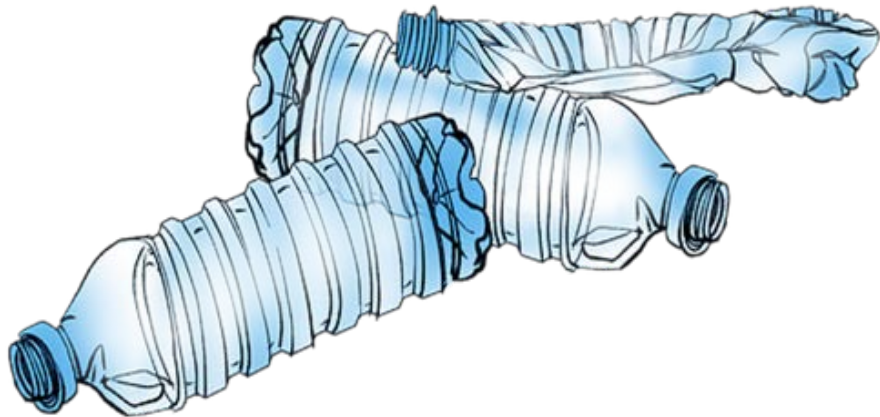
Instructions:

1. **Together, brainstorm** what contributes to a larger footprint (e.g., showering too long, driving long distances, etc).
2. Using a pencil, students **trace their foot** on a piece of paper or poster.
3. **They list** eco-friendly **ways they can reduce** their footprint.
4. Teachers can **hang** footprints in the classroom.



3. Trash Tracker

An activity for students to calculate the sustainability of their lifestyle by tracking pieces of trash in a graphic organizer



Type of Trash	How Many?
Paper	1
Plastic	1
Metal	
Glass	
Other (describe)	

Trash Tracker: How-to Tips

1. Offline
2. High-beginner to advanced
3. Alone, groups, or as a whole class
4. Students count pieces of trash from their lunch/snack, or even trash they find on the playground.
5. Students record the amount of trash during one day, week, or month.
6. The class can **set a goal to reduce** the amount of trash produced.
7. Results and goals can be displayed in the classroom or school.



Trash Tracker Extension Activity



What's an extension or follow-up activity that you could do in your classroom?

Whole Class Extension Activity

1. As a class, brainstorm ways to lessen the classroom environmental footprint.
2. Make a classroom pledge to reduce your classroom footprint and have all students sign it.
3. Assign classroom monitors or helpers for different environmental tasks like watering the plants or turning off the lights.

A Pledge for a Greener Classroom

1. Recycle and reuse
2. Share with others
3. Turn off lights and close windows
4. Care for our classroom plants
5. Use a water bottle
6. Educate others!



Tips for Incorporating Environmental Topics In Your English Classes

1. Keep **age**, **level**, and **context** in mind.
2. **Visuals** are key!
3. **Model**, **guide**, and **scaffold** (e.g., pre-teach new vocab).
4. Follow up with a **discussion** or **extension** activity.



Benefits of Incorporating Environmental Topics into English Classes

- Simple and fun
- Helps students develop awareness about a contemporary issue
- Encourages self-reflection
- Supports development of a “can do” attitude
- Supports development of critical thinking and meaningful communication skills in English



Let's Reflect

What can you do in your classroom to incorporate environmental issues into English language teaching?



Share your ideas in the chat or comments.



As teachers, we can

- Teach English for environmental responsibility
- Incorporate local, environmental topics
- Help our students to be change-makers



Change is our challenge.

“When enough people come together, then change will come and we can achieve almost anything. So instead of looking for hope — start creating it.”

— Greta Thunberg

Swedish teenager and environmental activist



References and Resources

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Continued

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Reflection Questions

1. How might you incorporate environmental conservation topics into existing curriculum areas? What kind of units, projects, or activities might you add or adapt?
2. How might you include jazz chants in your ELT practice, whether focusing on environmental topics or other content and language areas?
3. What extension or variation ideas did the techniques in today's webinar inspire? How might you extend or modify the demonstrated approaches to best suit the needs of your learners?



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